

# THE CATHOLIC MIND

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## Joint Pastoral Letter of the German Hierarchy

*Full text of the German Hierarchy's collective pastoral drawn up at Fulda, August 19, 1938, and read in all the churches, with the exception of the Rottenburg diocese, whose bishop was banished. Reprinted from the Tablet, London, issue of September 10, 1938.*

**A**S we, German Catholic Bishops, address from the tomb of Saint Bonifacius a collective pastoral to our diocesans, we first of all testify to our oneness with Christ, whose Mystical Body links up its members in the deepest union. We send our hearty brotherly greetings to the Episcopate and all its Faithful of former Austria. Alas, the same spiritual conflict between world conceptions is openly and secretly stalking the land on both sides of the old frontiers, whilst the aims and methods of our enemies have not varied. We, Catholic German Bishops, have in previous Pastorals reported on a conflict that was none of our own choosing; and today we are forced to state, on unanswerable evidence, that the onslaught has in no way relaxed, but is growing more fierce and bitter, and naturally more effective.

Its obvious aim is to hamper and paralyze Catholic life, nay, to banish the Catholic Church from the midst of our people, and to uproot all Christendom by the substitution of a faith that has nothing to do with faith in God and Christian belief. On the more recent incidents in this conflict, the question rises to the lips of thousands of people in their religious anxiety, whether in spite of their loyalty to the nation and to the State, they still have the same rights as other citizens, or why, when accused, they should have lost all right of self-defense and be refused all hearing and credit. When we see a German bishop served with the incredible order to leave his diocese, and after his return in obedience to his duty, harassed by hurtful calumnies and violent attacks, Catholics must find it difficult to shake off the fear that within measurable time all the Bishops will be exposed to the same treatment on the part of irresponsible crowds. To our deep regret we have even heard and seen that the Holy Father's personal honor is not immune from scurrilous attacks. We, the German bishops and Catholics, give expression to the indignation of the whole Catholic world, and will rally round him all the more loyally, now that for our sakes his gray hairs and his sympathetic heart are loaded with insults and ingratitude.

#### PLAN TO DESTROY FAITH

The plan at present in numerous places is the complete extermination of the Catholic Faith in Germany. No attempt is made any longer to fall back on pleas of unfounded fears or calumnies due to anti-national feelings. Important personalities have openly declared to the masses that the destruction of German Catholicism is the one goal of their *Weltanschauung*. It is no excuse to say that no obstacles are placed in the free exercise of religious worship, for this we admit, although with reservations. The conflict lies else-

where, and aims at preventing the young and those who dwell in camps from entering the Church. Attempts are made to belittle and condemn whatever concerns our Faith, to divide our people and drive the Church out of public life. Thereby are we forced to the life of the catacombs, which spells the beginning of the end.

In order to justify this procedure, whatever is great and holy in the history of the Church is overlooked and excised from the very school books, whereas whatever is reprehensible and unworthy is placed in the limelight and magnified, without the least attempt at scientific criticisms or natural discretion. Did men of the past have a deeper urge for truth and justice than the leaders of the present? And in this pseudo-historical work no scruple is felt in drawing upon, and disseminating, works and writings which German science, as well as every unprejudiced reader, discards as valueless. Yet works and writings by Catholics are subjected to the most rigorous censorship, nay, frequently forbidden, confiscated or destroyed. Besides this, possible moral failings by priests and religious are persistently, and by the most dubious methods, being ferreted out, and trials that should have taken place long ago are indefinitely postponed. Meanwhile the Church is accused of cultivating secret relations of a political and personal nature with Russian Bolshevism, and this charge is obstinately maintained, despite the unequivocal declarations of the Papal Encyclicals and of the Church authorities, as well as those of the Bolsheviks themselves that their political system and their *Weltanschauung* have no more formidable and irreconcilable enemy than the Catholic Church. Every friendly word uttered by the Pontiff to other States or nations, every gesture, every move made in accordance with political etiquette and tradition, or justified by religious circumstances, is in-

terpreted as a partisan act, unfriendly to Germany, or as evidence of collusion with her enemies. Within our own German frontiers, movements are engineered to induce people to leave the Church; officials who are loyal Catholics, employes and Catholic students belonging to middle or higher schools, are constantly threatened with economic ostracism, which in some cases is carried out with utter cruelty.

Principles are adopted in the marriage laws which we cannot overlook without a joint protest. The preliminaries of the law of wills and bequests contain an uncalled-for clause on the clergy's greedy hunts for wills and scandalous speculations on death.

In case it be asserted that much of what we have to complain of and put up with is due to a reaction against our own faults and to necessities of defence, since we, German Bishops and Catholics, failed to adopt the right attitude towards the new Reich, we answer as follows:

#### LOYALTY TO COUNTRY

We German Bishops have repeatedly and in no uncertain terms asserted our loyalty to nation and country, even in its new form, and we have scrupulously done our civic duties. But we must frankly add that with the advance of the *Weltanschauung* movement it becomes more evident that even leading circles refuse to come to an understanding with us and with the Catholic Church. Besides, an intolerance of principles often makes reconciliation daily more difficult, and the course of mutual reactions points to the determined plan of abolishing the Church, abandoning every desire for peace, and even rendering a *modus vivendi* of mutual tolerance between Church and State impossible. But be it said once and for all that we, German Bishops, will not buy anybody's good will, or even tolerance, at the price of our Faith, nor by the sur-

render of the Church's rights, nor by the loss of our personal character and dignity. We German Bishops know what the Roman Catholic Church is: the very foundation of Christ Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind and the Eternal Son of the living God. The Catholic Church is the Kingdom of Christ the Redeemer, built on the rock of Peter and of the Popes, their successors, the corner-stone of religious truth, the source of grace, the only spiritual force that, in spite of two thousand years of persecution, retains full vitality and will carry on its century-long existence in the future; the same Catholic Church of which Christ said: The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.

That this conflict is not only waged against the Church, but against Christendom as such, has been proved by unmistakable evidence; for instance, the repudiation of the Old Testament. This was meant to discredit Christianity as a mummified relic of past ages, absolutely powerless and worthless for our present needs. Apart from this, it was held on the theory of race and blood that the personality and life of Jesus Christ are incompatible with the German soul; as also, that the outstanding articles of His teaching, especially the dogma of Original Sin and the Redemption, reward and punishment after death, are but Asiatic superstitions, which were surreptitiously forced on the German race. Christian moral principles are discredited as antiquated and meaningless. Driven by such teaching, youths in some districts proceeded to remove crucifixes from public life, heedless of their artistic value, because they were symbols of the Christian faith, or even to destroy them, to the scandal of the Christian nation.

This is altogether an exceptionally sad subject for contrasts. Whilst Catholic Spain has risen in deadly combat as the irreconcilable foe of the Bolshevik anti-christ; whilst Christians and Catholics in Germany

fulfil their obligations as citizens and soldiers in perfect loyalty and are ever ready to forgive and forget the insult heaped on them, we find many Germans trying to undermine the Christian faith, as though it were inimical to the nation, and deliberately proceeding to destroy it. A war of extermination has been declared against religion, on the false plea that it splits the German soul and paralyzes the country's energies. Will anybody believe that the growing division between Christian and unbelieving citizens is less damaging to the national community than a possibly permanent conflict between confessions? When we German Bishops openly declare, in the full consciousness of our responsibility, that this religious persecution must be stopped, we are convinced that we act rather in the interest of the country and the nation than in that of our religious faith. In any case, we cling to the words of Scripture: For we have no other foundation stone but Jesus Christ, and these words are true for every individual and for every nation. We therefore ask those of our compatriots who still love the truth and are still able to use their own minds, the following questions:

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED

Does he not stand self-convicted of insincerity who affirms in the same breath that Christianity has never struck roots in German soil, that it was submerged by the stream of time, struck by the lightning of German faith, that it is rotten to its very marrow, and yet on the other hand that it takes immeasurable strength to tear this dead cedar from its Lebanon? Does he not give food for thought that millions and millions, eminent thinkers and scholars among them, have for fifteen centuries never felt for one moment that Christianity and its Divine Founder were alien to our national character; that they were

rather convinced of their perfect harmony as the last and happy fulfilment of our deepest religious yearnings for the truth and for salvation?

Is it not an incontrovertible fact that Christianity and Germandom were the joint creators of the higher German culture in the Middle Ages? Is it not evident that present-day German culture in its fullest extension has not only sprung from racial, but from Christian roots?

Is it not unthinkable that Christians and Catholics should be so narrow and primitive in their outlook as to have adopted—they, the children of light—the teachings of their faith as though they were but nursery tales, or even that they, like the primitive folks of the uncivilized world, should still be under the spell of magicians and medicine-men? Do those who persecute the Church not see in their heart of hearts that the conflict around Christianity has resulted in a regrettable splitting of the German nation, instead of working for union and uplift?

Are people really so deaf and blind as to think that the Christian sun that shines on the German nation can be snuffed out by decrees and guns? To prove the decadence of Christianity it should be necessary to point not only to the countries that lost Christianity, but also to what they lost by the loss of Christianity. Nor should we forget that for all the sad apostasies, there are Germans who have returned to their Redeemer.

Past centuries are evidence that apostasy from Christianity and the Church paves the way to apostasy from God, and the present day is no exception. We hear a good deal of the faith in God that must be preserved for the German people, but on closer inspection of this faith in God, it becomes at once evident that what is the God of one is not the God of another, and that there arises a multiplicity of conceptions of

God that are as mutually incompatible as fire and water. The Christ-God must be driven out and replaced by a "German God." But who is this German God? Is he different from the God of other nations? If so, then there must be as many gods as there are races and peoples, which means that there are none. The true God is one, the most perfect of beings, the purest Spirit, the Lord of all nations and times, the eternal Creator of all things, the ultimate goal of all that is spiritual and made after the image of God.

In the consciousness of our responsibility we raise our voices against the exclusive materializing of man and the denial of the soul's survival after death, for we wish to protect the German people against these aberrations and save them from ruin. But this we repeat: It is not against the nation or the State, but at the service of the nation and the State, that the issue lies, therefore against those whom, in virtue of our apostolic character, we must brand as the enemies of the nation. For this we shall be misunderstood and misrepresented, but there is a justice which no word can muzzle and no violence can repress. We have spoken in apostolic unanimity and we beseech the reverend clergy and the whole Catholic nation to listen to our words with the earnestness which the time requires, according to the words: "Who hears you, hears me" (Luke x, 16).

#### URGED TO BE TRULY CATHOLIC

We urge you to profess your faith by your exemplary Christian lives, by the Christian-Catholic upbringing of your children, by your brave defense of your Christian-Catholic inheritance. It is distressing to hear how difficult this profession of the Faith has become for many of our compatriots, and we therefore appeal for Catholic help, that none of our brethren be ever reduced to starvation for the sake of his Faith.



We urge you to persevere in your loyal love of people and country, for the injustice that some of our own people and country are doing us will do our Fatherland no good.

We urge you not to murmur, not to give way to discouragement: why do you fear, men of little faith? This is not the first storm that has swept over the Catholic Church of Germany, and it will not be the last. The more oppression weighs on us, the nearer we shall be to God: Blessed are you, if you suffer for justice' sake.

We urge you to remain unanimous and faithful in the bonds of the Catholic and Christian Communion which is yours, and do deserve the blessing promised to suffering, as it invariably leads to victory: "And hope confoundeth not."

We urge you to pray the Lord for Christian fortitude, which is stronger than violence. "For the continual prayer of a just man availeth much." And pray for our growing youth, which has come under influences that make one fear the worst for its faith—yet be it said to our great joy, many thousands of whom remain heroically true and steadfast. May Christ bless and protect them, the best Friend of the young and the only Eternal Truth!

May Christ live in us all; may divine wisdom, the strength of God, penetrate our souls; may the blood of the Redeemer rouse our hearts! He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other.

May Almighty and Merciful God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost bless you. Amen.

# Communism's Outstretched Hand

G. M. GODDEN

*Reprinted from the Catholic World, issue of September, 1938.*

**T**HE State Secretary of the Communist Party of New York State made an announcement, at the recent Tenth Party Convention, which is of considerable significance for the Catholics of America. "One of the most important problems" before the Party, declared Secretary Krumbein, is the problem of winning over the Catholic workers. "We have many Catholic workers in our Party," he claimed, adding that such Catholic workers find in Communism "the social and economic program that they believe the early Church stood for, making allowances for the difference in that period and the present." That is a valuable indication of the lines of attack now being employed by the Communist tacticians. It indicates the line, used with equal persistence in England, of *emphasis on the immediate aim*. "Let us all join hands," say the Communist leaders of 1938, "in furtherance of social reform and international peace, and in defense of democracy. These aims will suffice for immediate action. Join up with the Communist comrades, and you will hasten the advent, here and now, of better houses, higher wages, shorter hours, security from war, democratic freedom." This argument is reinforced by a steady outpouring of plausible hope concerning conditions of life under the Communist regime in the Soviet Union.

But the attack on the Catholic workers of America

(and of England, France and Ireland) by no means ends here. The Communist organizer is perfectly well aware that Catholics will be certain to hear the truth about the full Communist program—from the leaders of the Church—a truth which is so sedulously hidden behind the "immediate aim's" facade. They will certainly learn that the official Program of the Communist International lays down, as a binding obligation on every individual Communist in every country, the "task of systematically and unswervingly combating religion—the opium of the people" (*Program of the Communist International*. English Edition, p. 38). They will learn that the "decisions of the Executive Committee of the Communist International are obligatory for all the Sections"—that is all National Communist Parties—"and must be promptly carried out" (*ibid.*, p. 68); in other words, that membership in the Communist Party of America means implicit allegiance to a foreign dictatorship seated in Moscow. They will be furnished with first-hand attested evidence of the plight of the workers and indeed of all classes under the iron rule of the dictatorship *over* the proletariat, today, in Soviet Russia.

The situation being thus, to borrow a familiar Soviet phrase, the Communist organizer is faced with the necessity of *destroying the Catholic worker's confidence in his own Catholic leaders*; and this is exactly what is being attempted in America and in Europe today, with, we must admit, some measure of success. It is a tactical method openly employed by Secretary Krumbein at this Tenth New York State Communist Party Convention. Krumbein told his hearers that "attacks against the Communist Party inspired by the Catholic hierarchy" are "slandorous," and he gave detailed "reasons" by which he endeavored to convince the Catholic workers that their own leaders were deceiving them. Further, noting what he termed the

"progressive trends" in the ranks of the four million Catholics in New York State, Secretary Krumbein added: "Tens of thousands of them (the Catholics) are coming to the conclusion that the Hierarchy does not represent the interests of Catholics but, on the contrary, represents what the Catholic masses abhor, and what they fight against" (*Daily Worker*, New York, May 20, 1938).

That statement discloses the subtle penetrative line of attack now being made on the Catholic workers, and not only the workers, of America. Its import is heightened by the fact that this line of attack is part of a world-wide campaign, actively in operation already in France, prosecuted with the utmost vigor in "Republican" Spain, and apparent in Ireland—to name three salient examples. Forewarned is forearmed. What warning has France today for America in this matter of the "urgent problem" of winning over Catholics to Communism? The campaign in France was inaugurated as far back as April, 1936; but came into international prominence in October last, when the Secretary General of the Communist Party of France, Maurice Thorez, delivered his notable address, in Paris, on *La Main tendue*, the Outstretched Hand, proffered by the French Communists to the French Catholics. M. Thorez quoted various types of supporters. There was the unnamed young priest who came up "gladly to shake the hand held out to Catholics." We may expect to hear often of that young priest, and to find him invariably nameless. There was a Secretary of the "League for the Rights of Man" who urged collaboration by Catholics on the ground of the advantage of a *rapprochement* "between all international groups who maintain the primacy of conscience over the brutality of instincts"—a ground which will hardly seem logical to Communists properly trained in Lenin's well-known dogmas on the subservience of Communist morality to

Communist expediency. The adherents of a morality subservient to expediency cannot claim that they are maintaining the "primacy of conscience."

M. Thorez showed singular confidence in the ignorance of his audience when he ventured to assert that Communists desire to employ "in the spreading of our ideas exclusively ideological weapons"; the official estimate of the death roll caused by the spreading of Communism in Russia during the first four years of the construction of the Communist State is over 1,766,100. The death roll caused by the spreading of "Communist ideas" in Spain within the last two years has yet to be computed, but the figure 16,000 as the number of secular and regular Spanish priests that have been murdered has not been disputed. "Ideological" weapons alone do not produce casualty lists commensurable with those of a major war. Neither do such casualty lists, with their inevitable accompaniment of sheer terrorism, suggest as a likely outcome of Communism the "universal society united in labor and love" which M. Thorez promises to his Catholic dupes. Indeed, throughout this historic appeal the French Communist leader presumes on an immense lack of information on the part of the workers (manual and black-coated) with whom he desires to collaborate. He tells his Catholic hearers that Communism protects the family, obeys a "higher morality" ("for us morality is subordinated to the interests of the class-struggle," affirmed Lenin), and produces a "free and happy humanity." Clearly Catholic workers are not expected to read such first-hand documentation concerning the conditions of the family, of "freedom," of "happiness," and of "liberty of conscience," in Communist Russia today as is given in the recent publications of M. André Gide, and in the records of the American workingmen, Andrew Smith and Fred E. Beale, or of a non-political American traveler such as Carveth E. Wells, or of that resi-

dent familiar with Soviet Russia, W. H. Chamberlin.<sup>1</sup> In his eager effort to convince Catholics that in Communism they will find Catholic ideals put into action, M. Thorez finds common ground in passages in the Papal encyclicals, carefully selected without their contexts; and he has the audacity to assert that all that is needed is "mutual good faith, a mutual spirit of tolerance." Secretary Krumbein of New York State is more honest. He knows that a necessary preparation for this unholy alliance is to sow the seeds of disloyalty within the Church; to separate the Catholic "masses" from their Catholic leaders; to induce distrust, dissensions, disruption; to persuade the American Catholic worker that the Catholic Hierarchy are his enemies.

It is not without good reason that the French Communists are now claiming to be the spiritual descendants of the French revolutionaries of the eighteenth century; for especially in this matter of attempting to disrupt the Catholic Church they are following in the footsteps of the men of 1790. Much preliminary work for disintegration must have been carried out for even seven of the French bishops to forswear their allegiance to the Church by taking the famous "Constitutional" Oath imposed by the Constituent Assembly and solemnly condemned by the Pope. The number of the French clergy who were induced to accept the "Constitution" is not easy to compute, but that careful historian M. Gaxotte considers that fifty per cent is a probable estimate; and he adds the poignant phrase, "The ancient Church of France had been mutilated." It is a phrase no less appropriate to the efforts being made today. The "outstretched hand" conceals a knife the sharp blade of which will mutilate

<sup>1</sup> *Retour de l'U.S.S.R. and Afterthoughts on the U.S.S.R.*, André Gide; *I Was a Soviet Worker*, Andrew Smith; *Word from Nowhere*, Fred E. Beale; *Russia's Iron Age*, W. H. Chamberlin; *Kapoot*, Carveth E. Wells.

the Church in America in 1938 as surely as the Church was mutilated nearly two hundred years ago in France, unless that hand is disarmed.

To abolish the saints, religion, the churches, the clergy and God—that, in a nutshell, is the ultimate aim of the Communist policy of the outstretched hand extended to Catholics today with such insistent and plausible invitation. It is an aim which has been realized very fully in those areas of Spain which have fallen under “Red” control; and here we can see in active and most instructive operation that main line of Communist policy in regard to Catholics, the line of creating distrust and animosity between the people and the Hierarchy. In Spain in recent years, as in America today, the lying propaganda has been and is being diffused among Catholics that, to quote again the statement at the Tenth Communist Convention held this summer in New York: “The hierarchy does not represent the interests of Catholics but on the contrary represents what the Catholic masses abhor and what they fight against.”

It is but a step from this position to that in which Catholics will be urged to “abhor” and to “fight against” the leaders of the Church,—again on the most plausible grounds, and grounds which will certainly be carefully selected to fit in with the grievances of the moment. A stream of such lying propaganda has been issued in the attempt to divide devout and loyal Spanish Catholics from their own bishops, and from the Religious Orders. Some of the lies are so clumsy that it is difficult to believe that even the most ignorant could be influenced; others are subtle and cleverly timed. An attractively-jacketed pamphlet depicting a Spanish priest in friendly converse with Spanish “Red” troops is sold in London, but is published by the “North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, New York.” The weekly organ



published in London under the name of *The War in Spain* comes out into the open with the announcement that "Republican priests announce that a Pastoral Letter on a political subject carries no ecclesiastical weight beyond that accorded to individual opinion"; and the implication of this sentence is made clear by the caption to the paragraph in which it occurs: "Hierarchy versus People." That is a headline which may be found, in almost identical words in the new Irish monthly magazine published under the specious title of the *Workers' Republic*. If the tacticians of the Communist International, who control the policy of Communist action in all countries, attain their immediate objective, the seeds of disloyalty, disunion, disruption will be sown among the most active and generous-minded Catholics in America, in France, in Ireland, in England. For this policy, of fraternal cooperation for the common good, will be addressed especially to those Catholic men and women who are most conscious of the urgent need of reforms in the existing social order. It is a policy which can only be effectively countered by insistence on the essential quality of Communism—the quality of militant irreconcilable atheism. There can be no ground for union between the Catholic Church, whose aim is to restore all things in Christ, and Communists whose one anxiety is to tear society from Christ. Pope Pius XI has laid down, with no shadow of doubt or obscurity, the law for Catholics, in clause 58 of the Encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*: "Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it, in any way whatever."

Communism is known by its works, and not by a sudden facility for quoting the New Testament, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. Those works have been made clear to the whole world in Russia and in a large part of Spain. They are perfectly consonant



with the teachings of the Communist prophets Marx and Lenin. They bear the hallmark of a fierce hatred of all religions, of all religious practice, of all religious ideology; a hatred translated into relentless massacre and murder. They bear the further hallmark of fierce class hatreds, which are also translated into relentless massacres and murders. The Communist outstretched hand which is proffered with such glib eloquence to the Catholics of America today is more deeply blood-stained than was the hand of an Attila or of a Genghis Khan. It was the official organ of Communist power in Russia which proclaimed that "our program is an all-embracing and blood-soaked reality."<sup>2</sup> It was the prophet of Communism, Karl Marx, who affirmed that "Religion is the opium of the people." It was his great follower Lenin who taught that "all religious ideas are an unspeakable abomination."<sup>3</sup> These are the beliefs that are the driving force which goads Communists, once they have achieved power, to destroy and desecrate Christian churches; to kill Christian priests and men and women who are members of Christian Religious Orders, adding not infrequently, out of sheer malicious hatred, tortures which make of death a merciful release; and to perpetuate the even more terrible crime against humanity, the crime of the "slaughter of souls," since the Communist ideal is that man should no longer be "soul-encumbered."

These are the fundamental truths which must be brought home to all Catholics in America. It is pertinent to recall that a venerable Marxian principle is "to appropriate the institutions of the bourgeoisie in the interests of the proletariat." The policy of the "outstretched hand" is devised to appropriate the Catholic Church in the interests of the Communist International.

<sup>2</sup> *Pravda*. September 9, 1923.

<sup>3</sup> *Lenin on Religion*. English Edition. P. 50.

# Modern Poverty Is Often the Weapon of Oppression

REV. THOMAS J. FITZGERALD

*Reprinted from the Catholic Times, London, England.*

**T**HOUGH the principles of Christianity do not change, their application and emphasis must of necessity vary from age to age in accordance with the changing circumstances of man, and thus it is that even the fundamental things in the teaching of our Blessed Lord, though finding their place at all times in the life of every Christian, permit of adaptation in accordance with the needs of the times. This is true even of the Eight Beatitudes, the corner stone of the whole of the Christian edifice. Let us at the outset remember that whilst the perfection of the Beatitudes is for saints, the practise of the Beatitudes in some degree is for all. Bearing this in mind, let us take some of them and see how the lessons that they inculcate can be applied to the circumstances of our lives.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" runs the first, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Christ our Lord praises poverty—not merely the spirit of detachment but actual poverty. The words "Blessed are the poor in spirit" do not mean merely they who are detached from the things of this world, the words "in spirit" would seem rather to mean voluntary poverty, for after all a poverty that is not a matter of choice or at least of loving acceptance cannot in any sense be regarded as a virtue. It is rather a misfortune.

The poverty that Our Lord praises is a real poverty and a voluntary poverty, at least in the sense of willing acceptance. Naturally poverty admits of degrees, and so the Christian who aims at practising this poverty praised by Jesus Christ may, in accordance with the measure of his grace and his good will, pass

through varying degrees of poverty, some slight, some very great: but what seems pretty certain is that unless a Christian is willing to practise a real poverty to some extent in his life, he has not got the spirit of Our Lord's teaching.

### POVERTY NOT EVIL

Now it is at this point that we need to see certain things in the world around us. In the first place there are those for whom poverty is an unmitigated evil, and this is true not merely of materialists but of the humanitarians who aim at improving the conditions of the people. And as there are large numbers of Catholics who at the present time following the instructions of our Holy Father the Pope, are working for social reform, there is a danger that they, too, all unconsciously, will slide into false views concerning poverty. There is a real danger that the Catholic social worker, filled with compassion for the poor, will forget that poverty has been praised and blessed by Jesus Christ.

The first spiritual lesson that a Christian man needs today is to have right views about poverty. Poverty is not an evil in itself, firstly because Our Lord blessed it and added to His blessing the force of His own example; and secondly because the end and aim of life is not the acquisition of wealth but the acquisition of virtue: not material prosperity but moral and intellectual development. Nor are the effects of poverty necessarily evil. However degrading may be the influence of destitution, character and grace may and do react against it. Monsignor Parkinson once wrote, "Wherever the poor congregate there will be found men and women of noble principle, of deeply religious feeling, of saintly virtue and heroic steadfastness of purpose." This testimony can be borne out by any priest whose work lies with the poor, whilst the history of the Church teems with the lives of men who, though

living in enforced and chronic destitution attained an eminent degree of sanctity.

Such, during the last century, were Saint John Vianney and Saint Benedict Labre, whilst Devas, in his *Political Economy*, pays a well-deserved tribute to the piety and virtue of the poor Irish families in Poplar. Poverty, in fact, seems to lend itself to the practice of some of the noblest of the virtues, such as loyal service, reverence, obedience, humility, self-denial, and Christian resignation.

#### MODERN INJUSTICE

We must not, however, fall from this into the opposite extreme, and suppose that poverty in itself is a virtue, for as Saint Thomas remarks, the object of a virtue must be something honorable and praiseworthy in itself, whereas poverty has no intrinsic goodness but is good only because it is useful to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of the pursuit of spiritual perfection. Its practice derives its merit solely from the religious motive which ennobles it or the circumstances under which it is accomplished, such as the fulfilment of a vow or the desire to resign oneself to the holy will of God.

Now how does all this square with the call to Catholics to work for the abolition of poverty in the modern world? The evil of modern poverty is not so much in its hardships as in the injustice of which it is the outcome. Modern industrial poverty is evil in the sense that it deprives the poor unjustly of that to which they have a right. It is the oppression of the poor that is condemned by the Church far less than their actual poverty, and that is something that though unpopular in the saying should nevertheless be said, for to the poor no less than the rich are addressed the words "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."